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**EXCITABLE AND DISOBEDIENT DOGS
(AND ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS)**

How can I determine if my dog is just acting like a "puppy " or is too excitable or disobedient?

Many excitable and rowdy behaviors that we see in puppies will diminish with time and proper early training. The unruly dog is one that continues to be difficult for the owner to manage past puppyhood or 6 - 9 months. This is a dog that does not respond to commands, will not walk on a leash, jumps on people, continually barks for attention, steals things or generally wreaks havoc on the household, The problem is compounded in large dogs because of their size.

Do dogs get "attention deficit disorder" or can they be "hyperactive"?

While hyperactivity disorder does exist in dogs, it is rare. Dogs that are hyperactive, a condition also known as hyperkinesia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), can be diagnosed by veterinary examination and testing. Dogs with hyperactivity disorder are difficult to train, respond poorly to tranquilization, may exhibit repetitive behaviors such as incessant barking or circling, may have gastrointestinal disorders, and can be extremely resistant to restraint. If these dogs do have attention deficit disorder they may respond paradoxically to amphetamines. This means that instead of getting more excitable when given amphetamines, these dogs tend to calm down. Most cases however, are simply overly energetic dogs that may not be getting sufficient exercise, or who are being accidentally rewarded when they act excitably.

Excitable and disobedient dogs can often be identified in early puppyhood. These puppies continually mouth owner's hands and resist attempts to control them for even the most minor procedures. Many people do not realize why puppies chew on them and so give the incorrect feedback to control the behavior.

How can I prevent my puppy from becoming a disobedient dog?

Vigorous and frequent exercise sessions and an early start to training are necessary to prevent puppies from becoming too rowdy, Waiting to train your puppy until it is 6 months of age can often let these disobedient behaviors take hold. Then we have to undo behaviors we don't like in order to get the ones we want. Puppies have very short attention spans. You must motivate the puppy to perform using positive reinforcement. With early training, excitable puppies can often have their behavior channeled in the correct direction.

I have tried training my dog without success. "What went wrong?"

Many owners may have tried traditional obedience training without success. The dog still jumps on people, barks incessantly and defies commands. Often times owners are inadvertently making training and reinforcement errors. Perhaps you have tried yelling at your dog, pulling on choke collars and resorted to isolation to avoid the problem, all without success. Let's address these training and correction techniques to see what works, what is ineffective, and why.

When dogs misbehave, isolation or confinement is often used. However, this can make the problem worse. Dogs are social and want to be with people. The more that they are isolated, the more unruly they will be when they are let out. Pawing, barking, licking, and jumping-up are attention-getting, greeting and play-soliciting behaviors in dogs. Confinement may be necessary when you are not available to supervise your dog, but he or she must first be provided with sufficient exercise, play and attention, and the opportunity to eliminate. When you arrive home and release the dog from confinement, it must be taught to greet you properly. Quiet, calm, and non-demanding behaviors should be rewarded with play, affection and attention, while demanding, jumping-up, or excitable behaviors should be met with inattention.

Another common training error involves actually reinforcing the behaviors that you do not want. For example, when a dog is outside barking to come in and you ignore the dog for 10 minutes but finally let the dog in, what have you accomplished? The dog has just learned that 10 minutes of incessant barking gains access to the indoors. If your dog is extremely rowdy, jumps up or is constantly demanding attention, these are also behaviors that you may be inadvertently rewarding. Instead of patting, giving attention, or perhaps even a treat to try and stop the behavior, it is essential that these behaviors are met with inattention.

Another common problem is giving your dog a command, and if there is no response, you repeat the command. This sends the message that 2 - 3 repetitions of the command are needed to get the desired behavior. When you ask your dog to do something, be sure that you can get the dog to perform the behavior. If you tell the dog to sit and he does not, make him sit. Do not ask for a behavior unless you know that the dog can perform it on command.

Reprimands and punishment are also often unsuccessful. Punishment may reward behavior by providing attention. Punishment that is too harsh may lead to anxiety, fear of the owner and problems such as aggression or submissive urination. Disruption devices such as a shake can (small stones in a tin can), an air horn, or an ultrasonic device may deter undesirable behavior without causing fear of the owner. They do not serve as a punishment but do provide a window of opportunity for retraining. In general, punishment is seldom effective at correcting undesirable behavior, and should be discontinued if it is not immediately successful.

In summary, let's look at the excitable and unruly dog. Many owners shout at or physically discipline these dogs, but, as discussed, this may further reward the unruly

behavior. Then when these dogs are relaxed or tired out, owners (perhaps thankful for the peace and quiet) ignore them. Demanding behavior is rewarded while quiet behavior is ignored. If this is what is happening in your home, deal with it by treating all demanding behavior with inattention (or disruption techniques) and reward calm, non-demanding behavior with play and attention.

Retraining begins with good control, and a good understanding of the proper use, timing and selection of rewards. An obedience training class that uses rewards and non-disciplinary techniques for control (such as head halters) is a good start. One important concept will be reinforced here. Unless you provide rewards within 5 seconds of the desired behavior, or punish the pet as the behavior is occurring, dogs may know that you are happy or angry, but they do not know about what!! Punishment after the act does no good, confuses the dog, and can even lead to the kinds of disobedient behaviors that owners find objectionable. Remember, you want to punish the BEHAVIOR, not the PET.

What do I do if disobedience and unruliness persists?

Most traditional training techniques and devices use punishment to interrupt and deter misbehavior. Punishment may teach a dog what not to do but it does not teach the dog to perform the desired response. Many of the devices that have been designed to control and train dogs are attached around the dog's neck to "choke" or correct.

The head halter has been designed to gain control over the dog's head and muzzle so that the handler is able to train the dog to perform the desired response. The goal of training is to encourage and reward correct responses rather than punish incorrect responses. A head halter uses a dog's natural instinct to follow a leader using pressure sites that cause the dog to respond in a behaviorally appropriate way. The neck strap simulates the pressure control that a mother dog uses on her puppies. A second strap encircles the dog's nose and simulates how the leader dog would put his mouth over the muzzle of a subordinate dog. The head halter also communicates leadership in a number of other ways. Since dogs have a natural instinct to pull against pressure, a forward and upwards pull on the leash, will close the mouth and the dog will pull backwards and down into a sit. Therefore, whenever the sit command is given and the dog does not immediately respond, the owner can pull the leash up and forward, look the dog in the eyes, and get the desired response. As soon as the dog is sitting or even begins to sit, the restraint is released and the dog praised. It is important to remember this fact; the natural response of a mother or leader dog is to release the restraint or grasp as soon as the dog submits. Therefore, the release not only serves to reinforce the desired response, but is also consistent with natural canine communication. The command, pull, and release should be immediately repeated if the "problem behavior" is repeated, and positive reinforcement (treat, patting, play) should be provided if the dog continues to "behave". Once the dog is behaving appropriately, yelling, jerking or pulling on the leash and physical punishment are illogical, and will lead to increased resistance, fear and perhaps aggression. Using a leash and head halter, an upward and forward pull can be used to immediately and effectively control barking, jumping up, play biting, stealing objects, or pulling and lunging. Lastly, and equally important, the head halter does not

encircle and tighten around the lower neck, so that the dog is not choking while the owner is trying to train.

Some brands of head halters are designed so that they can be left on the dog, just like neck collars, all the time when owners are home. A long indoor lead can be left attached for control from a distance. As soon as the dog begins to engage in unacceptable behavior, it can be interrupted and directed into performing the desirable behavior ('sit', 'down', 'quiet'). By the same token, if you give the dog a command and he does not obey, you can always get the compliance that you require if the halter and leash is attached.

Now that I have more control, what else do I need to do?

Often the key to training an unruly dog into an acceptable pet is continuous control until you reliably can get the behaviors that you want. This is most easily accomplished by having the dog on leash (attached to a body harness, non-choke neck collar or head halter). This allows you to immediately interrupt undesirable behavior and teach your dog the correct lesson. Only after the dog no longer engages in the undesirable behavior, and responds to verbal commands, should the leash be removed. An integral component of controlling an unruly dog entails restructuring the situations so that the unruly behavior is not able to take place, or that interruption is immediate. This can take various forms such as: keeping the dog on leash so that it cannot run through the house, closing doors to other rooms and limiting the access of the dog to areas where he is unsupervised, only interact with the dog in a positive manner and set up situations so that the dog will do as the owner asks.

This brings up another vital issue in controlling excitable and disobedient dogs. Many owners are so frustrated that the only interaction that they have with the dog is negative. They have lost the joy of pet ownership. Worse than that, they do not reward the behaviors that they do want. It is just as important to tell the dog when it is doing the correct behavior as to discipline the bad. It is also important to practice the training that you may ultimately need. An example of this is training the dog to sit and stay in the front hall. How will the dog know to sit and not run out the door when people come to visit, (a highly excitable event), if the dog never practiced doing so when things were calm?

TEACH THE DOG WHAT YOU WANT IT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU NEED IT!